

VETERANS' SERVICES

Fiscal Year 2011

The Department of Veterans' Services continues to offer assistance to veterans and their families through a number of federal and state programs. The state veterans' benefit program provides temporary assistance to veterans and their families who qualify to receive benefits and can show need. These benefits provide for medical care and cash for living expenses.

The Department of Veterans' Services will also aid veterans and their families in the filing of federal forms that are necessary for them to receive a wide range of benefits provided by the Veterans' Administration. The Department now has access to many veteran-related internet sites and government agencies.

State-Wide and Regionally:

The Commonwealth's Department of Veterans' Services has gone virtual and now in our second year of our office handling all our caseload through the state's Virtual Gateway, I would declare it a success. This system allows us to work faster, and get authorizations in a quicker more efficient manner. The Town's Treasurer has also been trained and now this year has access to our reporting system and certifies our expenditures on line. This has truly improved accuracy and interdepartmental communication.

Our office participates in both the VA's 5 year plan to end homelessness for veterans and the Western Massachusetts 10 year plan to end homelessness. We have assisted over a dozen formerly homeless veterans secure housing in our community through the new revised federal program HUD/VASH.

This is a VA and HUD partnership to give Sec 8 vouchers and individual caseworkers to formerly homeless vets whether they are from the Vietnam War or the more recent conflicts in Southwest Asia. We are also a member of the Western Mass Taskforce to End Homelessness that meets regularly to address the barriers to this 10 year plan.

Locally:

Our office experienced many changes in FY 11. We successfully finished our second year as being a member of the Central Hampshire Veterans' Services district. Our district consisting of Northampton, Williamsburg, Chesterfield, Cummington, and Pelham, expanded over this last year to include the towns of Worthington and Goshen have joined in November and January, respectively. This has allowed us to keep down administrative costs and continue to give Amherst full-time coverage through the district office and three veteran service officers with an array of experience and expertise.

In October 2010, Kathleen Pollard retired from this office after a long career with the Town of Amherst. She will be sorely missed in Veterans' Services and the Town as a whole.

The Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony, and the Veterans' Day Ceremony held by this department were well attended this year. We have begun developing a veterans' council made up of our veteran and non veteran civic organizations in order to help organize and increase the groups who march in our parades and who participate in our ceremonial events. We hope to show our strong support and desire to honor those who have sacrificed for our country and our community, our Amherst veterans. I am grateful to all who participated this year.

Steven James Connor
Director of Veterans' Services